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Is the Theory of Evolution Compatible with the Christian Faith? (Participant's Guide)

Robbin Eppinga

Dordt College, robbin.eppinga@dordt.edu

Ashley Huizinga

Dordt College

Lydia Marcus

Dordt College

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Participant's Guide to

Is the Theory of Evolution Compatible with the Christian Faith?

A Study of Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!

Dr. Robbin Eppinga, Ashley Huizinga, Lydia Marcus
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa
Summer 2017

How to Use This Material?

This study of the relationship between the Christian faith and the science of evolution (as presented in Denis O. Lamoureux's *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!*¹) is composed of six/seven "weeks." Each week contains two sections. The 1st section deals with two sets of questions. The first set, *Reading and Reflection* questions, are to be completed before each meeting and are meant to help the participant wrestle with the concepts introduced in that week's chapters. The second set, *Discussion* questions, are to be written by the participants (and the leader) as they read. Both sets of questions are meant to foster discussion, but your groups should by no means limit itself to the questions contained in these sections. The 2nd section includes external references and additional questions for "Digging Deeper" into the topics addressed in the 1st section.

This study is intended for **informal, small group** discussion, such as that of a Bible study, catechism, or family reunion. Each theme may be unpacked on its own, but it is the hope of the authors that the entire study may be useful to the interested reader (leader and participant alike). The study is also aimed toward **high school students, college students, and post-college adults** with an interest in how science and the Christian faith interact.

As you read, it is our hope that you will come across (and come up with) questions which challenge you, both in understanding your personal faith and in understanding science. In these questions, you will have the opportunity to grow through asking and answering these questions in a healthy setting. Consider the context and history of these questions: Why has the church historically believed in *this* answer or *that* answer? What might you say if you were a Christian scientist? How might you be challenged to defend your answer?

¹ The title of *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* is reminiscent of a book titled *Evolution: The Fossils Say No!* which partially inspired Lamoureux's grappling with the conflict and compatibility models of science and faith. The book, published in 1979 by Master Books, is an attempt by author Duane Gish to argue against evolution based on fossil record observation.

Who is the author of *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!*?

At the time of this study's publication, Denis O. Lamoureux is a professor of science and religion at St. Joseph's College at the University of Alberta, Canada. As the reader of his most famous work *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* will soon discover, he has doctoral degrees in theology, biology, and dentistry.

Lamoureux began his faith journey as a young-earth creationist, raised in a household of young-earth creationists. After being confronted with the physical evidence of evolution for the first time in college, he renounced his faith, but an experience reading Scripture called him back to Christianity as a young-earth creationist. Some time later, he began to consider the possibility of the integration of evolution and the Christian faith, and he came to a tentative acceptance of evolutionary theory as a possible natural mechanism of God's eternal plan for Creation. Now, he is a staunch evolutionary creationist and evangelical Christian.

It is important to note that Lamoureux *is* an evolutionary creationist, sometimes referred to as a "theistic evolutionist" (although he denounces this term in his book). Not all members of a discussion group may agree with the implied bias towards evolutionary creationism which is evidenced in the book, but the writers of this study guide note that his book is of use for *all* Christians seeking to better understand the concept of evolutionary theory and how Christians may wrestle with/respond to the questions posed by a majority of the scientific community and other interested individuals.

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Week 0: Before You Begin

Overview Questions

1. Have you come up against the theory of evolution before? Was this a moment of confrontation, discussion, debate, curiosity, etc.? How did you respond?
2. Do you think that evolutionary sciences can enrich and deepen the faith of a Christian?
3. What is the difference between atheistic and theistic evolution? To which of the two are most Christians referring when they condemn "evolution"?
4. What is the heart of your Christian faith? In other words, what belief(s) do you consider absolutely irrefutable? On which, if any, beliefs is your personal relationship with God founded?
5. What do you consider the Image of God?

Week 1: Creation “versus” Evolution

Chapter covered: “Trapped in ‘Either/Or’ Thinking”

Reading and Reflection

“Trapped in ‘Either/Or’ Thinking”

1. How does Lamoureux answer the angry young woman in the beginning of the chapter?

2. What is the dichotomy that Lamoureux mentions?

3. What was the "completely logical conclusion" which challenged the Christian faith of the younger Lamoureux in the chapter? What do you think about his reasoning?

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

Consider the following quote as you read and study this work: "Biological evolution has significant theological implications, especially for Christianity" (158).

Week 2: Biblical Interpretation

Chapters covered: "Opening God's Two Books," "Terms That Begin to Free Us"

Reading and Reflection

"Opening God's Two Books"

1. Why did Lamoureux decide to get a Ph.D. in theology and a Ph.D. in biology?
2. What is "scientific concordism"?
3. What does Lamoureux consider "so much more important than any view on how God had created the universe and life? What do you think of this statement?
4. What is a transitional fossil and why might it be significant to a Christian scientist?
5. Name the three examples of evolution which Lamoureux explains in-depth in this chapter. Which of the three, if any, do you consider especially intriguing or convincing?

“Terms That Begin to Free Us”

1. What is complementary about the relationship between modern science and Christian faith?
2. What is the "act of faith" of anti-religious atheist Richard Dawkins?
3. What does the author claim that Genesis 1 does not reveal? What does he say it does reveal?

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

Lamoureux says that "the word 'evolution' is conflated with a godless and purposeless view of the world" and "the term 'creation' is conflated with the literal interpretation of Genesis 1" (45). Do you agree, or disagree?

Consider the questions Lamoureux poses to the reader of this chapter. "Is it possible that statements about nature in Scripture do not align with the physical world because God accommodated and allowed the biblical writers to use the science-of-the-day? More

specifically, did he communicate timeless spiritual truths by using an ancient understanding of origins as a vessel to deliver them? In other words, is it reasonable to reject scientific concordism, but to accept spiritual correspondence?" (60). What do you and your group think of these questions? Do you have answers to them?

Week 3: God's Works and God's Words

Chapters covered: "Intelligent Design and the Book of God's Works," "Ancient Science and the Book of God's Words"

Reading and Reflection

"Intelligent Design and the Book of God's Works"

1. What do you think about the titles "Cosmic Artist" and "Supreme Engineer" for God?
2. What are the six categories of biblical design put forth in Psalm 19, and which two extra categories are found in Romans 1?
3. What is Lamoureux's *speculation*?

"Ancient Science and the Book of God's Words"

1. What is the Principle of Accommodation?
2. What, according to Lamoureux, is the central purpose of Scripture?

3. What is the difference between eisegesis and exegesis?

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

In the “Intelligent Design” chapter, Lamoureux mentions *upward* and *downward* steps of faith. What does he mean by these?

What do you think about the following excerpt: "As Christians, we can proclaim that Jesus is the Lord of our 13.8-billion-year-old universe. Therefore, as science advances, every amazing discovery can be viewed in the light of God's lordship over creation, including all the discoveries from the evolutionary sciences"?

Take a second look at the Billy Graham quote on page 112. How does the author feel about this? How do you feel about this? Do you agree with Billy Graham that God's creative method does not make any difference in regard to who we are and our relationship with the Lord?

What are your thoughts about the Lord using an evolutionary process to create men and women?

Week 4: Five Basic Positions

Chapter covered: "Moving Beyond the 'Evolution' vs. 'Creation' Debate"

Reading and Reflection

"Moving Beyond the 'Evolution' vs. 'Creation' Debate"

1. Explain each theory of creation and how a proponent of each would justify his or her beliefs, as briefly but as objectively as possible.

Young-earth creationist:

Progressive creationist:

Evolutionary creationist (Denis O. Lamoureux, the author of *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* is an evolutionary creationist. Many (Christian) science professors in colleges and universities today are also evolutionists; consider interviewing one of these in order to gain a complete picture of what evolutionary creationism might include):

Deistic evolutionist:

Dysteleological evolutionist:

2. Which 4 beliefs does Lamoreux think are essential to the Christian faith?

3. What is your position on origins? Do you have an opinion regarding scientific concordism?

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

"...it was never God's intention for any animal to go extinct, like the dinosaurs" (130). What do you think about this statement?

How many different kinds of creationists do you interact with? Is there one of these five basic views that is entirely new to you?

Week 5: Famous Scientists and Historical Perspectives

Chapters covered: "Galileo and God's Two Books," "The Religious Evolution of Darwin"

Reading and Reflection

"Galileo and God's Two Books"

1. How do you respond to "Salvation deals with our relationship with Jesus, not with the age of the earth, not with the fossil record, and not with how God created the universe and life, including humans"? Positively? Negatively? Indifferently?

2. Another particularly interesting assertion from the chapter is: "My church and Sunday school had indoctrinated me with the assumption that scientific concordism was a feature of the Word of God" (148). How does your experience with church and Sunday school compare? Why might this teaching be a common feature of churches today?

"The Religious Evolution of Darwin"

1. What did Charles Lyell claim in his book *Principles of Geology*?

2. Which two conflations/assumptions did Darwin make, in Lamoureux's judgment?

3. The existence of _____ in nature made Darwin reject intelligent design. What are your thoughts on this?

4. Have you ever read/heard a convincing refutation of the rational argument for design? If so, explain what about the argument persuaded you.

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

Is there a difference between a "God-of-the-gaps" and Galileo's assertion on page 139 that "I have no doubt at all that, where human reason cannot reach, and where consequently one cannot have a science, but only opinion and faith, it is appropriate piously to conform absolutely to the literal meaning of Scripture"? Those who hold to a God-of-the-gaps have no use for a God who is also sovereign over human reason. Rather, their God is found *only* in the unknowns, in the as-yet-mysterious gaps in human knowledge that haven't been filled by science. Scripture for these proponents holds value only in so far as science offers no answer, and the Bible is read literally only where it does not contradict science. Is Galileo any different? Explain.

Week 6: Academics and Evolution

Chapter covered: "Let the Students Speak!"

Reading and Reflection

"Let the Students Speak!"

1. How has the relationship between science and religion been presented to you (such as in church, peer groups, college or university, etc.)?
2. Do you know a Christian scientist or a Christian who is studying/has studied the natural sciences? Consider interviewing them to get a closer perspective on what Lamoureux calls the "yearn[ing] for an integration of Christian faith and modern science, including human evolutionary biology" (173).
3. "[Students] often read in popular books and on the Internet that sciences proves there is no God. But science deals only with the physical, not the spiritual or metaphysical" (177). Have you found this to be true, or not?
4. Lamoureux states that most pastors are not aware of non-concordist interpretations of passages in the Bible that refer to nature. If this is true, how might it be remedied today?

Discussion

In addition to thinking about the above reading questions, please write two questions of your own regarding the chapters you read for today.

1.

2.

Digging Deeper

What is the heart of your Christian faith? Does your answer match the way that you answered this question in the Week 0 session? Why do you think it might have changed somewhat?

Lamoureux states in the final chapter that the best way to introduce young people to different perspectives on origins and Biblical interpretation is to "Teach the different views in a fair and balanced way, and young men and women will figure it out on their own" (180). Do you agree? In your opinion, has *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* succeeded in this? Has this study guide succeeded in this?

Terms

Chapter 1:

Atheistic evolution: the view that the world came into being via evolution and without God

Theistic evolution: the view that God used evolutionary processes to create the world

Dichotomy: opposition, conflict

Chapter 2:

Transitional fossil: a fossilized creature that exhibits signs of being in a developmental stage between two other forms.

Embryology: science examining the formation and development of living organisms

Chapter 3:

Creationist: a term that usually refers to a person who believes that God created the world in six 24-hour days using miraculous processes

Evolution a scientific theory which asserts that the cosmos and living organisms, including humans, arose through natural processes over billions of years

Cosmology: a study of the origin, development, and end of the universe

Geology: science investigating rocks and the formation of the earth

Biology: science explaining the living organisms

Teleologist: a person who believes there is an ultimate plan or purpose for our existence and that we are moving toward an end and final goal

Dysteleologist: a person who proclaims that the world does have any ultimate end or purpose, that our existence is ultimately pointless and that there is no ultimate right or wrong

Intelligent design: the view that the world's beauty, complexity, and functionality point toward an Intelligent Designer

Metaphysics-Physics Principle: a principle asserting that the relationship between metaphysical beliefs and scientific discoveries requires a step of faith both from science to religious and philosophical beliefs about nature and also from metaphysics to assumptions that influence scientific explorations, such as factors that impact observation of the physical world

Spiritual correspondence: the belief that statements about spirituality in the Bible align with spiritual reality

Inerrant: absolutely true; incapable of error

Chapter 4:

Irreducible complexity: a term coined by Michael Behe, who defines it as a single system which is composed of several interacting parts, and where the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to cease functioning

Special revelation: specific information from God that is given to men and women, the nation of Israel, the Christian Church

Biblical revelation: a form of special revelation in which the type of divine disclosure is verbal

Personal revelation: a type of special revelation in which the Lord reveals himself specifically to individuals and to his chosen people, as through answering prayers, in dreams and visions, or with signs and wonders

General revelation: a non-verbal revelation experienced by all men and women, including both religious and non-religious individuals, offering a broad outline of God's attributes and his will for humans

Natural revelation: a form of general revelation which deals with intelligent design in nature

Moral revelation: a type of general revelation that guides us in understanding right from wrong

Chapter 5:

Phenomenological language: poetic or figurative language based on appearance or visual effects/phenomena

Immutable: never-changing, always the same

Pre-formatism: the old belief that within each male sexual seed there was a tightly packed miniature human, giving the impression that men are the only contributors of seed in the creation of a life, while women appear to be only receptacles and nurturers of the seed of males

De novo creation: the belief that the creation was formed quickly and completely by a divine being who acts dramatically through miraculous interventions to make fully formed living organisms

Chapter 6:

False dichotomy: a misguided or mistaken belief that only two simple positions exist on a particular issue

Chapter 7:

Geocentrism: an old astronomical theory which claimed the earth is at the center of the entire universe

Heliocentrism: an astronomical theory presented by Nicholas Copernicus which claimed that the sun is at the center of the world

Chapter 8:

Darwinism: an evolutionary perspective on origins often mistakenly equated with a dysteleological view of evolution

Bibliography

Lamoureux, Denis O. *Evolution: Scripture and Nature Say Yes!* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. Print. ISBN 978-0-310-52644-5